

The Northern Electric Railway Co. and the Sacramento Northern Railroad Co. (N-73)

Bill Lesh (#3718)

Always something unusual existed about this line. It had the only interurban-carrying ferry boat in the United States (the Ramon); the nation's longest interurban line, running 183.4 miles from Oakland to Chico; and, the last local streetcar service in California to charge a nickel fare.

It began life in Chico, California, some 100 miles north of Sacramento, as the Northern Electric Company in June 1905. It was the dream of Henry A. Buttons to build a street railway from Sacramento to Chico. His first venture in electric railways was in Capetown, South Africa, in partnership with Cecil Rhodes. He followed that experience with streetcar lines in Geneva, Lisbon, Mexico City and Valpariso. Buttons began his California venture with his profits from Geneva.

The Northern Electric's first rails were laid to Chico's biggest employer, the Diamond Match Company. This is where NE's first piece of motive power was built. And the match company provided NE's trolley poles and ties.



Actual construction of the Northern Electric was begun in October, 1905. It was completed in Oroville on October 11, 1906, and fourteen days later opened for service.



The NE acquired the Marysville & Yuba City Street Railroad Co. on July 12, 1906. On January 12, 190,

the NE construction crew of 100 while laying tracks to Marysville found the newly laid tracks of the Western Pacific on the NE's right-of-way. They tore up the WP rails and continued on their way.

On July 20, 1907, the first Northern Electric train reached Sacramento from Marysville.



The Northern Electric Co. became the Northern Electric Railway Co. (NER) on September 19, 1907. The NER continued to expand to Yuba City (1907); Hamilton City (10/31/07); Woodland (7/4/12); Colusa (6/13/13); Swanton (1914); and, Willota (1914). These destinations were all branches off the main line.

On October 5, 1914, the NER went into receivership.

On June 20, 1918, the Sacramento Northern Railroad Co. was incorporated. Later in the same month (June 28, 1918) the Sacramento Northern bought the NER at auction.



The Sacramento Northern changed the color of the trolleys from the NER's ochre to Pullman green. In the 19s this color would be changed again – this time to blue and cream.

On December 23, 1921, the Sacramento Northern was taken over by the Western Pacific. Soon the Sacramento Northern acquired the former Oakland, Antioch & Eastern Railway Co. which came to be known as the San Francisco-Sacramento Railroad Co.

Commuter service between San Francisco and

Sacramento (via the Bay Bridge) ended on August 26, 1940 (only 19 months after opening), along with service at the Colusa and Woodland branches. Commuter service between Sacramento and Chico lasted until October 31, 1940. The last remaining bit of commuter activity of the Sacramento Northern ended between San Francisco and Pittsburgh ended on July 12, 1941.

Electric service was discontinued and changed over to diesel for the freight trains using the Sacramento Northern rails. Portions of this line still function under Union Pacific management.
